

state of the market. The unfortunate law became the favourite child of Parliament. Through a period of two generations, its penalties were continually increased, and new measures for its enforcement enacted, while its unreasonably low tariff remained unaltered. The effect of these statutes was to teach the free labourer lawlessness and the nomadic habits which increase it ; constituted authority became his enemy; he was driven to the life of the outlaw. While the villein was bound by the sentiment of the Irish peasant, as well as by the law of the land, to the plot of ground which his fathers had tilled for generations, the free labourer knew of no such ties. Although his family must often have rendered it difficult for him to flit, many of his class took to a roaming life, and passed from district to district, working when they could get wages that pleased them, and often robbing when they could not. The Commons of the Good Parliament complained in words which show how close was the causal relation between the Statute of Labourers and the break-down of law and order in 1381 :—

' If their masters reprove them for bad service, or offer to pay them for the said service according to the form of the said statutes, they fly and run suddenly away out of their services and out of their own country, from County to County and town to town, in strange places unknown to their said masters. And many of them become staff-strikers and live also wicked lives, and rob the poor in simple villages, in bodies of two or three together. And the greater part of the said servants increase their robberies and felonies from day to day/ ¹

In the previous decade it had, with reckless severity, been ordained that if the sheriff failed to catch a workman condemned under the statute, he should declare him an outlaw, whom every man might slay at sight. ²

But there was another characteristic of the labourer who had no land, which tended, almost as much as these nomadic habits, to make him fit to rise against oppression. He became, in good seasons, rich and important with a prosperity previously unknown to the English rustic, and still at that time

¹ *Rot. Parl.*, ii. 340.

* 34 Ed. **III.**, **cap.** 10.